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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1981, two questionnaires (one for the adult male and one for the adult female) were mailed to households (randomly selected from voter registration lists) in nonmetropolitan counties throughout Kentucky to examine their satisfaction with their communities and personal situations, family interaction, and marital quality. A total of 2,818 persons completed the questionnaires, representing 61% of the total possible respondents. The survey indicated that Kentuckians were quite satisfied with their marriages, family lives, and communities. The majority of Kentucky adults often participated in joint marital acitvities and seldom disagreed on important issues in living. Likewise, rural Kentucky men and women reported high levels of satisfaction with their marriages and family life. More than 70% of both men and women indicated that they were very satisfied with their marriages, and 65% were very satisfied with their family life. Husbands and wives generally agreed on the division of family jobs and family decisions. Children were very much involved in family decisions. Marital quality of Kentucky couples, based on joint participation in activities and agreement on important issues, was high. This suggested that participation in joint activities was important and had positive consequences for marital relationships. (NQA)

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University of Kentucky • College of Agriculture • Department of Sociology Vol. 5, No. 1, 1983

KENTUCKY FAMILIES IN THE '80S: A SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT

*Janet L. Bokemeier and Richard C. Maurer**

HIGHLIGHTS

- Kentuckians are quite satisfied with their marriages, family lives, and communities.
- Husbands and wives generally agree on the division of family jobs and family decisions.
- Children are very much involved in family decisions.
- Marital quality of Kentucky couples, based on joint participation in activities and agreement on important issues, is high.

INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1981, a study was conducted to examine issues important to Kentucky families in the 1980s. This publication provides a description of families in Kentucky and reports a summary of the answers given to survey questions about satisfaction with communities and personal situations, family interaction, and marital quality.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF NONMETRO KENTUCKY FAMILIES

The characteristics of the people included in the sample closely resemble the characteristics of the Kentucky nonmetropolitan adult population as a whole (see Table 1). The overall age of the respondents is 48 years. Just over half are female. More than half of the sample were raised on a farm, while only one in twenty was raised in a large city. More than 80% are married. Men are slightly more likely than women to never marry or to be remarried. Women are more likely to be widowed. Like the national trends, at any one time, less than 5% of the adults in Kentucky are divorced or separated. The average level of education is a high school degree. Kentucky women are more likely than men to have some high school or to complete high school. However, there are only slight differences between males and females in college and vocational school attendance.

The employment and income characteristics of the sample are also reported in Table 1. Nearly one-third of the sample are in families whose total family income is less than $15,000. Around one-fourth of the sample have a total family income of $25,000 or more. The rest are fairly evenly distributed among the middle income categories.

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Table 1.—Descriptive Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N=2,818. 1,291 Males and 1,527 Females)

	- PERCENTS -		
	Male	Female	
Sex	45.8%	54.2%	
Marital Status			
Never married	4.9	3.7	
Married	85.5	75.4	
Remarried	5.3	4.2	
Divorced/Separated	2.3	3.2	
Widowed	1.9	10.4	
Education			
Completed grade school or less	27.5	18.7	
Some or completed high school	36.6	47.1	
College or vocational school	35.9	34.1	
Employment Status			
Employed	66.3	44.7	
Homemaker	.5	30.4	
Unemployed	4.2	3.3	
Retired/Disabled	26.3	19.1	
Other	2.7	2.5	
Second Job			
Yes	15.5	5.8	
No	84.5	94.2	
Where Raised			Total Sample
On a farm			57.2
Open country, not a farm			15.5
In a town			22.1
In a city (50,000+)			5.3
Total Family Income			
Less than $5,000			14.2
$5,000 - $14,999			32.0
$15,000 - $24,999			27.1
$25,000 or more			26.7

Not quite half of the adults are employed full-time and another 8% are employed on a part-time basis. Two-thirds of adult men are employed. Nearly half of all women are in the labor force, either employed or looking for work. This is similar to the national rate of female labor force participation in nonmetro areas. Thirty percent of the women are full-time homemakers and about 20% are disabled, retired, self-employed or students. Men are significantly more likely to have a second job than women.

COMMUNITY SATISFACTION

People in nonmetro areas of Kentucky are generally quite satisfied with their communities and personal situations (see Table 2). More than 80% of the sample responded that they are satisfied with their residences, communities as places to live, family lives, standards of living, marriages, and their lives as a whole. More than 70% are satisfied with their jobs, their health, and what they are accomplishing in life. Fewer respondents are satisfied with job opportunities (60%), community services for elderly (53%), and public services such as fire protection, police, and education (59%). Less than half of the sample are satisfied with child care services in the community. About one-third of the adults said that they are satisfied with community recreation facilities and programs for youth and with public transportation.

Satisfaction with place of residence and various aspects of life in general is quite high in nonmetropolitan areas. However, various services and opportunities are often much less available in nonmetropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas. Thus, while residents enjoy the life-style in nonmetropolitan areas, they are not as satisfied with the services that are available.

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FAMILY INTERACTION

In everyday family living, many roles such as housekeeper, economic provider, child-rearer, and recreation director are performed by husbands and wives. The way husbands and wives divide up these roles is determined in part by the general attitudes of society. For example, husbands traditionally have been the breadwinners and wives the housekeepers. However, these general expectations are changing, so families are developing different ways of filling family roles. Some families share most roles equally. Others divide up the roles so each spouse has equal but separate responsibilities.

Sharing Family Jobs

Kentucky families were asked who usually did certain jobs, the husband more than the wife, the wife more than the husband, or did the husband and wife do the job about equally. In general, men and women report similar family strategies for dividing up family jobs.

Certain jobs are clearly wife-dominated. General housecleaning, preparing breakfast during the week, grocery shopping, making doctor and dentist appointments, and writing letters to relatives are usually the wife's responsibility in about 75% of the households (see Table 3). These tasks—housekeeping, nurturing, and upkeep of kin ties—are part of the traditional roles of the wife-mother. Tasks for which husbands usually have responsibility include lawn care, preparation of federal income taxes, and household repairs.

A substantial proportion of the respondents indicate that they share tasks traditionally husband dominated. With both tax preparation and lawn care, a substantial percent report that the wife usually does this task or that they share equally in the job compared to other tasks traditionally husband dominated. Thus, many Kentucky families

Table 2.—Satisfaction with Community or Personal Situation

	Percent Satisfied[a]
With my house, apartment, or mobile home	82.3%
With my community as a place to live	82.1
With my family life	89.9
With my job	78.2
With my health	72.4
With my standard of living	81.2
With my marriage	91.5
With what I am accomplishing in life	76.3
With how I feel about life as a whole	84.0
With my job opportunities	60.1
With child care services in this community	46.0
With community services for elderly	53.0
With community recreational facilities and programs for youth	35.4
With public transportation	32.1
With public service	58.7

[a]Percent of 2818 respondents who say that are "very satisfied," "somewhat satisfied," or "a little satisfied" with each item.

Table 3.—Who Usually Does Selected Family Tasks

	- PERCENTS -		
	Husband Dominant	Husband-Wife Equally	Wife Dominant
Housecleaning			
Men's responses	1.6%	10.5%	87.9%
Women's responses	1.1	9.7	89.2
Write Letters			
Men	4.1	10.3	85.6
Women	2.3	9.6	88.1
Groceries			
Men	8.6	18.9	72.5
Women	7.4	17.7	74.9
Doctors Appointment			
Men	4.2	23.7	72.1
Women	2.2	20.6	77.2
Breakfast			
Men	11.1	15.1	73.8
Women	10.0	14.0	76.0
Money and Bills			
Men	26.4	28.6	45.0
Women	22.1	29.1	48.8
Gardening			
Men	48.1	36.1	15.8
Women	42.8	38.0	19.1
Lawn Care			
Men	64.4	21.4	14.2
Women	59.5	23.4	17.2
Do Taxes			
Men	53.3	24.4	22.2
Women	47.9	26.0	26.1
Household Repairs			
Men	76.1	17.9	6.0
Women	68.8	21.9	9.3

are becoming less traditional and are reassigning role responsibilities to meet their unique family needs and abilities. Family jobs that are undergoing change include fixing breakfast, tax preparation, lawn care, gardening, and paying bills.

The financial family role was studied through two tasks: keeping track of the money and bills and preparation of federal income tax. With both tasks, about a quarter of the respondents indicate that they share the job equally with their spouses. Wives are more likely than husbands to be in charge of family bookkeeping, whereas husbands are much more likely than wives to take care of the federal tax forms. Clearly, the financial role is undergoing the greatest change. The greater involvement of wives in family financial matters is partly a consequence of the increasing proportion of women entering the labor force and contributing wages/salaries to the family economic base.

Gardening is the family task most often shared equally. To many families, gardening is both a productive activity to supplement the purchase of family groceries and a recreational or hobby-type activity.

Sharing of Family Decision Making

The ability to make decisions in a family is a sign of one's power and influence. Family decisions may require directing how a family will spend money or time. Decisions differ by their long-run importance to the family and by how often they must be made. The way family members acquire power or influence is a result of traditional attitudes about who should have the say, the ability to bring resources into the family, and responsibilities for certain activities. Although the individual who does a certain task may not always be the one to decide how it should be done, as individuals assume major responsibilities in family roles, their power and influence relative to the other family members are affected.

In this study of family life, we asked respondents who, in their marriage, decides some specific issues that often face families. That is, does the husband make decisions always or more than the wife or vice versa? Or are decisions reached by husband and wife equally? More than 90% of adults agree that generally a wife and husband should share in making major decisions. Thus, we expect most families to report egalitarian decision making.

In regard to decisions about how much money they should borrow, where to live, where to go to church, and whether to eat dinner out, more respondents indicate egalitarian decisions (see Table 4). This refers both to families in which husbands and wives discuss and arrive at the decision jointly and those in which husbands and wives separately make equal numbers of decisions relating to a given topic. Those who indicate that these decisions are *not* reached jointly or equally agree that men are much more likely to dominate in decisions regarding borrowing money and where to live but that women have a more influential say in where the family is to attend church. In the fourth decision area, whether to dine out, the responses show a fairly even split between husband and wife dominance.

Family issues on which the husband is much more likely than the wife to make the final decision include whether the husband should take a new job and what car to buy. Decisions in which the wife is more likely to have the final say are whether the wife should take a new job, the weekly food budget, and whether a family member should see a physician. In all these decision areas, a significant proportion of the men and women report an egalitarian decision-making pattern in the family. It was found that men are much more likely to decide whether their wives should take a new job than wives are to make the decision concerning their husband's job. Thus, with the exception of decisions on money spent for food, men are more influential in family economic-financial decision making.

Sharing Child-Rearing Decision Making

Certainly one of the most important tasks for most families is that of rearing children. Even though the average number of children in Kentucky families has declined in the twentieth century, still the vast majority of all Kentucky couples either have or plan to have children. In our study, 75% have children. The following sections are based on the responses from the 1,145 parents with children under the age of 18.

In our survey, we explored how couples deal with some of the responsibilities and jobs related to child care. Also, we were interested in the role that children play in the day-to-day life of the family. More specifically, what part do children have, if any, in sharing family or household tasks, and what say do they have, if any, in making selected decisions that will impact on them.

Table 5 presents how Kentucky families share four child-related jobs that were selected for study. It shows generally that the wife is more likely to fulfill the responsibility. It should be noted, however, that the responsibilities for the various jobs are parcelled out in very differing ways.

Table 4.—Who Has Final Say in Selected Family Decisions

	- PERCENTS -		
	Husband Dominant	Husband-Wife Equally	Wife Dominant
What Car to Buy			
Men responses	48.7%	48.3%	3.0%
Women responses	49.0	48.8	2.2
Borrowing Money			
Men	35.1	62.9	2.0
Women	36.7	61.0	2.4
Husband Take New Job			
Men	57.6	41.1	1.3
Women	57.3	41.5	1.1
Wife Take New Job			
Men	11.7	51.2	37.1
Women	10.6	53.2	36.2
Weekly Food Money			
Men	6.8	39.7	53.5
Women	6.2	35.7	58.0
See Doctor			
Men	5.3	54.6	40.1
Women	3.3	54.2	42.5
Where to Live			
Men	24.6	72.3	3.1
Women	23.6	73.5	3.0
Where to Attend Church			
Men	5.9	78.8	15.3
Women	5.7	74.8	19.4
Dinner Out			
Men	13.5	74.7	11.7
Women	15.3	75.9	8.8

Table 5.—Child Care and Parenting: Who Does It?

	- PERCENTS -		
	Husband Usually	Husband-Wife Equally	Wife Usually
Shop for Child Clothes			
Men responses	1.3%	9.0%	89.6%
Women responses	0.5	8.0	91.4
Help with Homework			
Men	10.4	37.4	52.2
Women	8.2	34.6	57.2
Give Permission to Visit Friends			
Men	6.1	62.5	31.4
Women	3.8	56.2	40.0
Set Allowances			
Men	18.4	55.8	25.8
Women	15.7	55.3	28.9

Table 6.—How Parents and Children Share Tasks

	- PERCENTS -		
	Parent Usually	Parent-Child Equally	Child Usually
Make Child Bed			
Fathers' response	62.1%	13.7%	24.2%
Mothers' response	59.3	13.1	27.6
Take Out Trash			
Fathers	62.2	17.2	20.6
Mothers	63.9	15.0	21.0
Clean Car			
Fathers	73.0	18.4	8.6
Mothers	72.6	16.4	10.9
Do Evening Dishes			
Fathers	79.8	12.9	7.2
Mothers	80.9	11.1	8.0
Dust and Sweep			
Fathers	80.4	15.4	4.2
Mothers	79.2	16.9	3.9

In roughly 90% of the cases the wife is most responsible for shopping for clothes for the children. The wife also is seen as being most often delegated the task of helping with the children's homework, although in more than a third of the families both husband and wife are equally involved. It is much more likely that the wife rather than the husband has the say in giving permission for the children to visit friends; however, in about 60% of the cases both spouses feel that this is an equally shared task. The area of setting allowances is also seen as an equally shared task by more than half of the respondents. Of the four tasks, setting of allowances is the task showing the highest percentage of fathers taking responsibility.

Children's Part in Family Interaction

In dividing household jobs between parents and children (see Table 6), the parents are usually the ones to perform the tasks. It should be remembered that these data were gathered from husbands and wives only, no children. The children's perception would, undoubtedly, be somewhat different from that of their parents. Making the child's bed and taking out the trash are the tasks the children most often perform, while dusting and sweeping and doing the evening dishes are the tasks least often the responsibility of the children.

In the area of sharing family decision making (see Table 7) between parents and children, parents are generally the decision makers. There is, however, a very substantial degree of equal sharing reported. The decisions that are most often made by the parents are church attendance and where the family goes on vacation. What to watch on television, attending particular after-school activities, and whether a child can work to earn extra money are each reported as being usually the parents' decision by roughly half of the families; but in approximately 40% of these three decision areas, the children are reported as being equally involved.

MARITAL QUALITY

Family life in Kentucky has been undergoing many changes over the past decades. Many men and women are postponing marriage; thus, by marrying at a later age, their families are often smaller. Rates of divorce have increased. An ever-increasing proportion of wives and mothers are entering the labor market. At the same time, general social attitudes have become more accepting of divorce and women working outside the home.

The nature of marriage relationships has become more centered on companionship and satisfying personal, social, and emotional needs of husbands and wives. Most Americans agree that enjoying and sharing similar activities and open communication are very important goals for a marriage. With the many changes in family life and a growing emphasis on companionship and communication, there is more room for disagreement and couples may experience more conflict and tension in their marital relationships.

To examine the quality of marriages of rural Kentuckians, marital partners were asked to indicate how often they disagreed on selected issues and how often they did certain activities together. Spouses also were asked how satisfied they were with their marriages and family life in general.

Disagreement Among Mates

In Table 8, the degree of disagreement between spouses on twelve issues is presented. Issues that are most often the cause of frequent disagreement between spouses are "being tired," "major decision making," "dealing with parents and in-laws," "aims, goals, and things believed important," "housekeeping," and "household expenses." Issues that are seldom the topic of disagreements in marriages are "religious matters," "you or your mate's jobs," and "not sharing love." Male and female responses are very similar in all the categories.

Activities Together

As with reports of disagreement, men and women generally agree as to how often they do certain activities together. In Table 9, the percent of men and women who do certain activities together is reported. The activities mentioned most often (by more than 50%) as being done together frequently are "being affectionate toward each other," "sharing some interesting news," "discussing a problem together," and "doing something the other particularly appreciates." These frequently shared activities reflect the importance of companionship and communication in Kentucky marriages. Activities that are social in nature, "having friends visit," "visiting with friends in their home," and "going out together," are more likely to be done occasionally together. Activities which couples report seldom doing together tend to be conflict-oriented and include discussing getting a divorce, having a quarrel with each other, and working together on a hobby.

Table 7.—How Parents and Children Share Decisions

	- PERCENTS -		
	Parents Usually	Parent-Child Equally	Child Usually
Child Job			
Fathers' response	53.8%	37.8%	8.4%
Mothers' response	50.3	42.8	7.0
Television Viewing			
Fathers	50.7	39.3	10.1
Mothers	49.8	40.4	9.7
After-School Activities			
Fathers	56.1	35.9	8.0
Mothers	52.5	39.6	7.9
Go to Church			
Fathers	71.7	26.8	1.5
Mothers	68.3	29.0	2.7
Vacation Plans			
Fathers	69.5	29.5	1.0
Mothers	65.6	33.5	0.9

Satisfaction with Marriage and Family Life

In summary, we found that the majority of Kentucky adults often participate in joint marital activities and seldom disagree on important issues in living. Likewise, rural Kentucky men and women report high levels of satisfaction with their marriages and family life. More than 70% of both men and women indicate that they are very satisfied with their marriages, and 65% are very satisfied with their family life. This suggests that participation in joint activities is important and has positive consequences for marital relationships.

DATA

In 1981, questionnaires were mailed to adults living in nonmetropolitan counties throughout Kentucky. Respondents were selected at random from voter registration lists. Two questionnaires were mailed to each household, one for the adult male and one for the adult female in each household. A total of 2,818 persons completed questionnaires, which represented 61% of the total possible respondents. Because we used a random sampling technique and the data from this survey are similar to data on Kentucky nonmetro residents as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, we are confident that these findings reflect the general characteristics of nonmetro Kentucky families.

Table 8.—How Often Couples Disagree About Certain Issues

	- PERCENTS -		
	Seldom	Occassionally	Frequently
Being Tired			
Men responses	56.3%	29.0%	14.7%
Women responses	54.7	30.5	14.8
Major Decision Making			
Men	54.0	34.7	11.3
Women	54.2	33.2	12.6
Dealing With Parents/In-Laws			
Men	66.6	22.6	10.8
Women	67.9	20.3	11.8
Aims, Goals, Important Beliefs			
Men	62.5	27.5	10.0
Women	65.3	23.4	11.4
Housekeeping			
Men	67.8	21.6	10.5
Women	67.7	19.8	12.5
Household Expenses			
Men	57.3	32.1	10.6
Women	59.7	29.6	10.6
How to Spend Leisure			
Men	59.3	30.0	10.7
Women	61.4	29.5	9.1
Time With Friends			
Men	65.8	24.1	10.1
Women	68.0	23.3	8.7
Being Away From Home			
Men	67.0	23.4	9.6
Women	67.9	22.2	9.9
Not Sharing Love			
Men	72.4	18.9	8.7
Women	72.5	17.6	9.8
Your's or Mate's Job			
Men	74.9	17.8	7.3
Women	76.7	16.2	7.1
Religious Matters			
Men	78.2	14.1	7.7
Women	76.7	13.2	10.1

Table 9.—How Often Couples Do Certain Activities Together

	- PERCENTS -		
	Seldom	Occassionally	Frequently
Affectionate Toward Each Other			
Men responses	7.4%	24.0%	68.6%
Women responses	6.3	20.7	72.4
Share News			
Men	6.7	26.8	66.5
Women	6.0	23.5	70.5
Discuss Problems Together			
Men	7.2	27.0	65.8
Women	7.3	24.0	68.7
Do Something Other Appreciates			
Men	8.1	40.1	51.8
Women	7.7	34.6	57.7
Talk Over Couple Relationship			
Men	22.8	37.3	39.9
Women	21.4	36.7	41.9
Go Out Together			
Men	23.8	37.1	39.1
Women	23.9	34.2	41.9
Have Friends Visit for Evening			
Men	29.9	46.7	23.4
Women	26.8	48.8	24.4
Visit with Friends at Their Place			
Men	32.7	48.0	19.2
Women	31.0	48.1	20.9
Hobby			
Men	48.2	30.8	21.0
Women	48.2	30.4	21.4
Quarrel			
Men	48.4	42.1	9.5
Women	44.8	44.9	10.3
Discuss Getting Separation/Divorce			
Men	93.1	5.0	1.9
Women	92.0	5.7	2.3

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